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POLITICAL HOTSHEET

April 29, 2009 4:24 AM

After 100 Days, Obama's Transparency Vow Receives Mixed Reviews

Posted by [Declan McCullagh](#) | [25](#)



(CBS/istockphoto.com)

A White House "virtual town hall" that Barack Obama hosted last month was intended to be an exercise in open-microphone democracy that would allow the president to interact with average Americans.

Aides billed it as permitting members of the public to "pose a question or vote for a particular question" using the [Google Moderator](#) utility. A new area of the WhiteHouse.gov Web site was titled [Open For Questions](#), and nearly 1.8 million votes were cast.

That was the plan. After voting began, though, a committed group of mischievous activists (and their friends) [deluged](#) WhiteHouse.gov with their votes -- and questions advocating the legalization of marijuana soon topped the site's "green jobs," "financial stability," "jobs," and "budget" categories. Obama eventually told the live audience that he doesn't think pot legalization is "a good strategy to grow our economy."

The White House's experience with reefer madness reflects the challenges that Mr. Obama faces when living up to his campaign [pledge](#) to create a "new level of transparency" through "cutting-edge technologies."

At 100 days into the Obama administration, Washington observers said that the president has made some significant steps toward using technology and the Internet to honor that campaign promise. In other ways, they said, Mr. Obama has not yet lived up to it.

"In general, we've been very optimistic," said [Ari Schwartz](#), vice president of the [Center for Democracy and Technology](#).

Compared to his predecessors, Obama is an unusually wired chief executive. Bill Clinton [sent](#) only two e-mail messages as president and [has yet](#) to pick up the habit. George W. Bush ceased using e-mail in January 2001 and [said](#) toward the end of his presidency that he's looking forward to e-mailing "my buddies" after leaving the nation's capital.

But Obama, whose campaign made aggressive use of the Internet, is an inveterate e-mailer, saying "I'm still clinging to my BlackBerry" before taking office. White House press secretary Robert Gibbs [told reporters](#) after the inauguration that, thanks to a "compromise," his boss could keep a security-enhanced BlackBerry for e-mail.


Schwartz and others suggested that it's unfair to judge Mr. Obama's record on technology and openness after 100 days, especially when the president himself set a 120-day deadline for an internal review.

One of Mr. Obama's first acts as president was to [sign a directive](#) ordering his chief information officer to devise ways to make the administration more Internet-friendly within that time period. (The [memorandum](#) says agencies must "harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public.")


In early March, Obama [named](#) Vivek Kundra, Washington, D.C.'s chief technology officer, to the position of federal CIO. Kundra [said](#) that he wants "to ensure the public has access to information, and to rethink the way the public interacts with the government in an information economy."

One of his office's projects is the not-launched-yet [Data.gov](#) Web site, which is intended to be a warehouse of government data for public consumption. (For the District of Columbia, Kundra's office created the [D.C. Digital Public Square](#) Web site, which provides data feeds and even ways to follow government activities through Twitter and Facebook.)

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The White House also faces the challenge of upgrading a clunky and out-of-date computer system to allow them to do things like send SMS text messages and [mass e-mail updates](#).

"They're putting out a report," said Schwartz, referring to the 120-day review. "We've had some conversations with the open government people and they seem to be looking at a lot of the issues we think are important."

The [Sunlight Foundation](#), a non-partisan group that advocates for open government, has [created a Web site](#) allowing voting on what's most important to see in the 120-day review. The winner so far: Formal data standards, which would allow programmers to extract government databases to be incorporated in their own applications -- in much the same way as [Google's announcement](#) this week does. (Sunlight also was the sponsor of a so-called [Transparency Camp](#) in Washington recently.)

Another area that's attracted more attention under Mr. Obama's administration than it did under that of George W. Bush is blogging. The White House has a [blog](#) (with comments disabled and no actual posts by the president so far). White House Budget Director Peter Orszag [has a blog](#); so does the [State Department](#) and [Homeland Security](#) (with comments permitted).

Overall, though, the Obama administration has been "more talk than action, that's for sure," said [Jim Harper](#), director of information policy studies at the [Cato Institute](#) in Washington, D.C.

It's true, Harper said, "that it takes longer to do a lot of the things the president has promised. However, there are things he promised and things he could have done starting on Day One that he didn't do."

One of those is adhering to what seems like a simple, unambiguous promise: Mr. Obama [pledged](#) that he would "not sign any non-emergency bill without giving the American public an opportunity to review and comment on the White House website for five days."

That hasn't happened. Mr. Obama [signed](#) a slew of non-emergency bills without posting them for comment. A [chart](#) shows that Mr. Obama posted only one of 14 bills for the required five days.

In addition, before taking office, Mr. Obama [promised](#) new openness in the presidential transition, saying "you can track these meetings" his transition staff had with groups seeking to influence policy. A "Your Seat At The Table" [memo](#) said: "This scope is a floor, not a ceiling, and all staff are strongly encouraged to include additional materials."

That didn't happen. Although Mr. Obama did disclose documents submitted to the transition staff, his Web site never provided a list of meetings with the names of groups and identities of participants.

Instead, only a [list of documents](#) submitted was made public -- meaning that if a meeting took place between the transition team and outside groups and no documents were exchanged, it remained secret. And even though meetings with White House staff are generally more important than meetings with transition staff, no similar disclosure policy has been adopted.

This and the WhiteHouse.gov five-day period could be easily fixed, Harper argues. "It's totally within the purview of the president to say what should happen," he said. "And it's not something he said should happen."

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Just ask him to see his sealed birth certificate!
or if he knew the whereabouts of his Air force one plane.

why didnt he report it missing, you see this kind of thing after a drunken car reck. The guy goes home and says- Officer my car is missing!

Posted by [Trust_me_](#) at 10:36 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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MUD has more transparent qualities!

Posted by [Trust_me_](#) at 10:33 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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It is not Mr. Obamas fault,
the problem is the telepropter was made in China!

Posted by [Trust_me_](#) at 10:32 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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Obama has been very transparent. So transparent that I believe he has set a record for the

most apologies in the first 100 days of any president's term in office.

Posted by **woodapeapl** at 9:32 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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Obama has been very transparent and has kept all of his campaign promises.

All of our troops will be out of Iraq by May 2010.

He has refused to sign any bill with earmarks.

He has reviewed the federal budget line by line and removed any unnecessary spending.

He has cut income tax for 95% of Americans. We are living in the lap of luxury with our extra \$13 a week.

He is well on the way to cutting the deficit by the end of his first term.

your "facts" are way off. I can't tell if your post is serious or a joke. Time after time Obama said we will bring the troops home immediately. Once elected that changed to 10 months, only to be revised later to 23 months. Then to be topped off with not bringing them home but sending 30,000 them to Afghanistan.

Posted by **EDWARDPDX** at 9:22 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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Obama the narcissist is just as transparent as you might expect a Chicago thug-turned-Socialist-dictator to be.

The Democrat Party is based upon lies to the American public - how can they lie when they are truly transparent?

Obama is the ultimate bait-and-switch scam.

Posted by **CBSisSocialistPropaganda** at 8:05 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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"Transparency"??? Where has Obama been transparent? Oh, I know!! That trillion dollar spending bill passed early in the morning that was too big to read. Transparency in one of Obama's biggest lies.

Posted by **budmag06** at 7:20 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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A little off topic here but you just have to watch the new documentary on Obama. Google "the Obama Deception", Naturally, you must do further research and come to your own conclusions but this is a pretty interesting video. I voted for Obama, he was the worse of two evils...or so I thought.

CORRECTION...THE BETTER OF TWO EVILS

Posted by **EDWARDPDX** at 7:04 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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Posted by **EDWARDPDX** at 7:02 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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I'M WIDE AWAKE!!! ARE YOU?

Posted by **seriously121** at 6:50 AM : Apr 29, 2009
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